

Montgomery Countryside Alliance 2014 Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Nancy Floreen

City: Garrett Park, Maryland

Office Sought: County Council, At Large

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If you were asked to describe the County's Agricultural Reserve to someone, what would you say?

The Agricultural Reserve is a treasure. With 93,000 acres, the Agricultural Reserve demonstrates the county's commitment to agriculture and environmental protection. I applaud the farsighted planners who recognized that unchecked suburban development threatened the agricultural way of life and economy that had long been the foundation of the county. The County Council created the Agricultural Reserve so that farmers would keep farming and the county would protect open space. Innovation led to TDRs, the economic system that preserves farmland and provides farmers with a way to reap some financial benefit without having to sell their property for development. I have sponsored and supported a variety of measures to strengthen protections for the Reserve. Examples include limiting the size of septic systems and restricting private institutions. I also introduced the Council resolution opposing the bridge across the Potomac into the Agricultural Reserve.

What is your vision for the future of the County's Agricultural Reserve?

I believe that protecting the Agricultural Reserve from development is essential. My position has always been that we should place our primary emphasis in the Reserve on farming and other agricultural activities that enable farmers to have an economically viable way of life. Some activities are accessory to agriculture, and they support the farming community's ability to continue farming. One reason I supported some new provisions in our rewrite of the zoning ordinance was that they promote the economic vitality and sustainability of our farmers. The Agricultural Reserve also showcases environmental protection, enabling the protection of pristine forest and waterways.

What more should the County be providing in terms of legislation and/or services to realize that vision?

I listen to the agricultural community to figure out what the County should do in both legislation and services. Further, as I evaluate legislation, I try to be mindful of its impact on farming. I believe that we need to be cautious about assuming that legislation and regulations that may be needed and work well in the more urbanized areas of the County will be appropriate for the Agricultural Reserve. Balancing various priorities is critical. One way I approach finding this balance is to consult with farmers and others who live and work in the Agricultural

Reserve to assess a measure's impact and effectiveness.

What challenges exist to ensuring that your vision for the Reserve is realized?

The overwhelming majority of County residents neither live in nor know about the Agricultural Reserve. They are unaware that farming is an active part of the County's life and economy and, further, they do not appreciate the needs of the agricultural community. I believe that the preservation of the Agricultural Reserve depends on county residents learning about and coming to appreciate the Agricultural Reserve. That is why one action I take to protect the Agricultural Reserve is to use the chances I get to talk to the county's residents to introduce them to the Agricultural Reserve - to tell them that it exists and to describe what goes on there. Especially when folks ask me why we can't use "all that empty land" in the Reserve to build whatever it is they think we should be building, I explain why the Reserve is so essential to the County and why we have to protect and preserve it.

What role do the County's schools play in the support of our local food system and success of local agriculture?

I believe that one way to approach the challenge in Question 7 is to expand programs in our schools that introduce students to agriculture and the Agricultural Reserve. Many of our students already visit the Reserve on field trips. However, more programs across a broad spectrum of environmental and agricultural subjects would help students appreciate the value and opportunities that the Agricultural Reserve provides. Perhaps schools could arrange summer internships on farms for students who live in areas of the County outside of the Agricultural Reserve and rural areas.

The County has undertaken a comprehensive zoning code re-write. What are your thoughts about the County's zoning code enforcement? Does that division have adequate resources and is it properly functioning?

I have been dealing with issues of zoning code enforcement since long before I became a member of the Council. In my early career as a civic activist, an enforcement issue launched me into my appointment to the Planning Board and election to the County Council. Zoning enforcement can be difficult and contentious because sometimes the evaluation is inherently subjective. Enforcement is easier when the code has quantitative or other objective standards, and I made sure that the new zoning code has standards that are easier to apply. The rewrite simplifies the description of uses and their requirements. We need to give the enforcement division some time after the new zoning code becomes effective to determine what additional resources they might need. Anyone who believes that the code enforcement division, or any other part of County Government, is failing to do its job is welcome to call my office and we will try to help.

Do you support an additional Potomac bridge and highway in the Reserve or adjacent rural zones?

No. I sponsored the Council resolution in 2004 expressing the Council's opposition to a new Potomac River crossing which would land in the Agricultural Reserve.